

279

# INAUGURAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED

By EDWIN SERCOMBE, Esq.

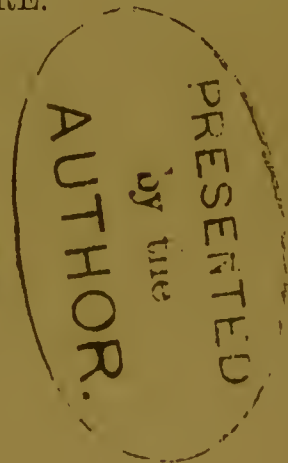
PRESIDENT OF THE ODONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN,

On MONDAY, MARCH 2, 1874,

UPON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE NEW PREMISES OF THE

DENTAL HOSPITAL OF LONDON,

40, LEICESTER SQUARE.



LONDON:

Printed and Published for the Society by  
WYMAN & SONS, 74, 75, GREAT QUEEN STREET,  
LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS, W.C.

1874.

PRINTED BY REQUEST.

## PRESIDENT'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

---

GENTLEMEN,—Deeply appreciating the honour your vote has conferred on me in placing me in this Chair,—the proudest position a man can hold in his own profession,—I hasten to offer you my profound and hearty thanks. I am not insensible of the responsibilities which are necessarily associated with this post; and I trust that I am not quite so ignorant of myself as not to feel how deficient I am in at least some of the qualities essential to a successful discharge of its duties.

Probably at no period since the foundation of this Society has the office of President been invested with more responsibility than on this occasion; and were it not for my knowledge of the loyal way in which the Society has at all times supported its chief officer, I should have shrunk from the position which your kindness has called me to fill. If I have not heeded that silent monitor which warns every man, if he will but hear it, of the dangers to which he is exposed from presumption, but have ventured to assume this duty, it is in reliance upon that generous spirit which has ever pervaded this Society; and in the belief that I shall have no unreasonable difficulty in guiding it safely through the year,

even though it prove to be one, as many anticipate, of more than usual importance. I can only promise to place my best abilities at your service, and trust that the year will be one of peace and prosperity.

There are moments in the existence of societies when it is well to pause and inquire whether their *raison d'être* has been justified; whether the objects originally aimed at in the formation have been kept in view, and have, to any satisfactory extent, been realized. The present appears to me to be an opportune moment in the history of the Odontological Society for such an examination.

In order that we may rightly understand the condition of Dental Surgery as well as the position of its professors in this country, and the need for such a Society as this, it is essential that I should take you back to a very remote period in the existence of our race. In doing so, happily, we do not encounter the difficulties which beset investigators in other remote subjects. With us nothing is left to conjecture. The records we have to read are not written in hieroglyphics, nor are they few and imperfect; neither, indeed, are they written on tablets that a few centuries can obliterate. Though it has been said of man's body, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," He who pronounced the sentence is slow to carry it into execution in its entirety; for the skull and teeth remain uninjured, and

almost unchanged, even when other parts of the body have for ages crumbled into dust. Where we find a skull with its teeth, there we have nearly all we require to tell us of the habits of the animal to whom it belonged ; the diseases, if any, to which those organs were subject ; and the sufferings incidental to them, or the immunity from suffering which their possessor enjoyed. As much cannot be said of any other organ ; of the viscera not a wrack remains, — the solitary case discovered in Jutland, and described by Sir John Lubbock, \* scarcely being an exception to this statement. When, in exploring a mound, we come upon a city of the dead, we cannot' even conjecture whether its inhabitants suffered from any of those various forms of heart or brain disease with which, alas ! we, in this age, are so painfully familiar. We cannot tell whether tuberculosis in some one of its varied forms decimated the land ; while the more enduring parts of the body — the fragments of the skeleton that survive, are as silent as the grave from whence they have been dragged. Not so the skull and teeth ; for though we may long in vain to know on what strange forms of animal and vegetable life the eyes gazed, that once filled those vacant sockets, or what sounds fell on those ears, or what thoughts of philosophy or of religion coursed through the brain, we can form

---

\* " Prehistoric Times," p. 26.

some idea of the kind of food of which the individual partook, and thus, in some very remote degree, can infer the manner of life. For example, the Dolicocephalic Briton suffered much attrition of his teeth, due, probably, to his being a vegetarian; we, therefore, imagine him the opposite of the wiry, agile, cunning hunter: such a condition being scarcely consistent with a vegetable diet.

But I must not allow myself to be betrayed into the regions of speculation. I have already said that we are able, upon an examination of a skull and its teeth, to state whether those diseases—with which we are so painfully familiar, in these organs—were known amongst prehistoric men. There is no doubt but they were, in some degree; as, indeed, they are in this age known among nations that live in what is sometimes very euphemistically called “a state of nature.” It cannot, however, I suppose, be denied, that disease in these organs bears some close relation to the civilization of man; but it must be admitted that among Brachycephalic tribes,—and we have no reason to suppose that they had advanced very far in a state of civilization—caries of the teeth was by no means uncommon. Mr. Mummery, a distinguished member of this Society, has, in an able paper, published in our “Transactions,” thrown much light on this subject. He has found decayed teeth in many skulls, and evidence of alveolar abscess, frequent enough,

not only to comfort any one who desires comfort by knowing that his sufferings are experienced by others, but to satisfy us all that while, doubtless, we pay some heavy penalties for the pleasures of high civilization, they are not quite so heavy as some stoics would have us believe.

As we descend the stream of ages and reach historic times, we find in the earliest writings such allusions to the teeth as leave no manner of doubt of their being known as organs that could, if properly provoked, lead their possessors a very unquiet life. In the Book of Psalms we find the writer, when supplicating vengeance on the wicked, praying God, in wild, poetic language, to "break their teeth in their mouth;" as if that was the consummation of human suffering. We have evidence of disease of these organs being known amongst the ancient Egyptians; but I believe it is not until the time of Hippocrates that we find any very distinct allusion to such diseases. "His attention," says an eminent writer, "was attracted to every malady, and no symptom that accompanied disease was suffered to pass unnoticed or unexamined. Even those of the Teeth were made the subject of critical inquiry." In the palmy days of Greece and Rome, when the wealthy and the great were as luxurious as they are now, the teeth received their share of attention; probably, however, as much at least on account of the part they played in the beauty of



the face, as on account of their importance in relation to health.

We all know the power of Beauty, but who dares attempt to describe its triumphs or to depict its tyrannies? Has it not changed the course of empires? Has it not made and unmade dynasties? To write its history would be to write the history of the world. Was it not for his comeliness of person and beauty of face that Saul was chosen the first king of the Israelites? For similar reasons Daniel was chosen to stand near the King of Babylon. Has it not too often been from mere beauty of face that woman has been raised to a position that has enabled her to influence, and even to enslave, her admirer, so that to retain her favour he has been willing to part with his patrimony, even to the half of a kingdom? But how effectually bad, defective, or irregular teeth can mar a face otherwise most perfect, we all know. In that lyric Hebrew poem, the Song of Songs, we find the writer, when describing the beauty of his bride, saying, *inter alia*, "Thy teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep that come out of the water;" doubtless meaning thereby that they were clean, white, and regular; a condition essential to the ideal of youth and beauty. In the days of ancient Rome, when satire wore its keenest edge, these organs did not escape.\*

---

\* "But yet, Sertorius what I say disproves,  
For though his Bibula is poor, he loves.



We find allusions in the works of Pliny, Martial, and other early Latin writers, to the use of powders for cleansing the teeth. It is even asserted that, in the sarcophagi of Egypt, traces are found to show that, in the days of the Pharaohs, dental deficiencies were supplied; and we know that among the ancient Egyptians one of the severest forms of punishment was the extraction of a front tooth.

From this necessarily very short and imperfect sketch we find that two distinct classes of men must, from the earliest times, have been engaged: the one in alleviating the suffering caused by diseased teeth; the other, in replacing the organ when lost from disease or accident. There would probably be little or no sympathy between these two: the one belonging to a class which, in the mythology of the Romans, descended from the gods; the other belonging to a class altogether inferior in social order. We have no evidence that the maker of artificial teeth aimed at any higher object than the restoration of those teeth

---

True! but examine him; and, on my life,  
You'll find he loves the Beauty, not the Wife.  
Let but a wrinkle on her forehead rise,  
And Time obscure the lustre of her eyes;  
Let but the moisture leave her flaccid skin,  
And her teeth blacken, and her cheeks grow thin;  
And you shall hear the insulting freedman say,  
'Pack up your trumpery, madam, and away!'

GIFFORD.—*Juvenal, Sat. vi.*

which affected the personal appearance of his patron. He had not the happiness of feeling, as the mechanical dentist of the present day feels, that his work contributed in no small degree to the health of his fellow-creature.

It is probable that the care of the teeth was in early times left almost wholly in the hands of the mechanician. The utmost the surgeon could do, so far as we know, was to attempt to remove a tooth when it caused insufferable pain. The operation was not an easy one; and, from the construction of instruments in use in even quite modern times—specimens of which were sent to the late International Exhibition by the College of Surgeons and our own Society—we may infer that, unless the tooth was allowed to become loose from successive attacks of inflammation, it was more often broken off than removed. The training of the mechanic would enable him to vie successfully with his more accomplished brother in the performance of this operation. In spite of the fact, that from the days of Hippocrates down to modern times, men of greater observation than their fellows wrote histories of the diseases of the teeth, and pointed out the important part they played, from almost the period of birth, in the animal economy, it became the fashion among medical men to affect profound ignorance on everything that related to these organs. Never-

theless, that prince of medical men, John Hunter, gave much attention to them, and wrote a most valuable treatise on the subject. Since his day, a slender line of men eminent for their physiological attainments, have devoted themselves more or less exclusively to the care of these organs. At the combined hospitals of St. Thomas and Guy, with all honour be it said, men have lectured on the teeth for about a century at least; and within the last twenty-five years every other Hospital in this metropolis has followed the example set by these older foundations. The object of these appointments has been no doubt to some extent gained, for medical students have acquired some knowledge of the diseases of the teeth, and have learnt to perform some of the simpler operations with an approach to dexterity. But the field of dental surgery having been practically vacated by the professional surgeon, it was left to any one to occupy it who felt disposed, and the laws of this country—never too restrictive—have not interfered with the liberty of the subject in this particular; for any one who has any aptitude, or imagines himself qualified, may assume to himself the title of “dentist,” or “surgeon-dentist,” whichever is thought most conducive to his success.

From what I have said it will be easy to perceive how the genus “dentist” of modern times sprang into being. His chief work being simply to supply artificial teeth, there was no great need of

any professional education. Manipulative dexterity being the primary requisite, under such circumstances it is not surprising that when a man of professional education devoted his attention to the diseases of the teeth, he drew as broad a line of demarcation as possible between himself and the men who called themselves dentists. Such an isolated position, and one so easily misunderstood by the outside world, was by no means attractive to a young man free to choose his own calling. Hence the cadets of the new profession were chiefly the sons of dentists who, endowed with gifts which in this country never fail to raise men above the level of their fellows, had opened up a road to large and lucrative practice. Such men naturally felt the importance of a thorough professional training. Daily experience of their own defects afforded them valuable help in directing the education of their sons. Beyond the valuable instruction which years of practice enabled them to impart, they sought therefore for their sons at the school of a general hospital that instruction in anatomy and physiology, in medicine and surgery, which they well knew was necessary to a man who wished to conduct his practice with credit to himself and with advantage to his patients. At the time of which I am speaking—forty years ago, the number of men who adopted this course was very small. Nevertheless a leaven was introduced, which has been gradually

leavening the whole lump. But of most of the men at that time calling themselves dentists, probably the less that is said the better. Dental surgery then was very much in the condition of a foundling, to be adopted by any one who thought he had an aptitude for it. Many were unfortunately tempted to enter its ranks, whose only desire was money-making. Their nefarious practices were virtually secure from exposure, because of the mystery in which, unhappily, many persons veiled their own dental defects. Charlatanism, like a fungus, thrives in the dark.

All this was injurious to the profession and to the public. Such men have given to the calling a bad repute, which the high character of many who now practise dentistry has not succeeded in entirely removing. There are yet to be found men, calling themselves dentists, who shrink not from advertising themselves in the daily press as capable of accomplishing that which at present human skill is utterly unable to accomplish; by their unblushing statements tempting numbers of the credulous into their houses, to find, when too late, that the man really to be trusted is modest in proclaiming his own qualifications. I may add, in the words of a recent review on dental surgery, "It is deplorable that journals of reputation can be induced to insert the specious and lying advertisements of such men as those to whom we refer."



Among the early English dentists, properly so called, who had received a good practical education, there was a point of union and a feeling of brotherhood; and I am told that, within this coterie—for it was so small that it could scarcely be called more—a great deal of cordial intercourse and free hospitality existed. It would have been surprising if, on some of these occasions of pleasant intercourse, these gentlemen had not occasionally dwelt on the undignified place in general estimation then held by the art by which they so worthily made their own living; and it would also have been surprising if they had not been led to devise some means to remove this undeserved stigma. If in this matter tradition is to be believed, the first indications of a resolve to raise the status of dental surgery were post-prandial. There is something in the constitution of an Englishman which makes this period of the day the most fruitful in good deeds, and there appears to be no exception to this rule amongst ourselves; but without pursuing our investigations into this subject further, we may say, that the idea having been evolved, action in due time followed. A committee was formed, and, after much consultation, a number of men of high professional character were invited to unite to co-operate in some organisation; and thus the Odontological Society came into being.



And now, Gentlemen, for a more clear understanding of the necessity of this Society, let me focus my previous remarks. In the year 1850 there were about 1,500 persons, more or less earning their living in this country by the practice of dentistry. It is scarcely possible to conceive a wider range of personal and professional qualifications to exist among any 1,500 men, calling themselves by the same professional name, than that which existed amongst English dentists. Among them were to be found men whose writings may be regarded as among the professional classics of this or any other country, and at the opposite pole there were men who could scarcely read or write—so wide was the circle which dental surgery described. Within this circle were included members of the medical profession who might well be divided into two classes—those who adopted dental surgery from their sense of the importance of a knowledge of the principles of surgery and medicine in the treatment of many of the diseases to which these organs are subject, and who became in their own generation the instructors of their brethren in the purely medical and surgical departments of dental surgery; and those who adopted this branch of the profession only after having failed in general practice. Among the men who had no professional education were to be found some of the most accomplished practitioners of the day; men

endowed with natural gifts—without which the most highly-educated man will be as great a failure in dentistry as in the art of sculpture—but which, combined with a vigorous mind and a determination to overcome the deficiencies of early teaching, placed them finally in the forefront of their profession. From these we might descend through varying scales of professional ignorance, until we reached the class of utterly unqualified men who were dentists only in virtue of their own nomination.

This was the state of affairs when the Odontological Society was founded. In the words of the opening address delivered by our first President, dental surgery was at that time almost universally admitted to be “a well-defined speciality, at the same time too closely allied to general surgery to bear separation from it. The dentists of England ought therefore to look to the College of Surgeons for that examination which should test their fitness to practise.” At the same time, it was felt by the founders of this Society that if dental surgery was a speciality requiring a special examination, it was necessary to provide a special school and special teachers.

Another reason for the formation of this Society I give, also in the words of the Inaugural Address, viz., “to provide a point of union amongst its members, where subjects interesting to the whole body of educated practitioners might be intro-

duced and fairly discussed for the mutual benefit of all, and through which the contributions of dental literature, at present scattered through the pages of medical journals, and often lost to those to whom they are most interesting, might be collected, so as to form both an instructive and valuable library for reference."

How far the Odontological Society has justified the hopes of its founders I will now proceed to discuss. Previously to its existence, the difficulty of obtaining a complete education in this branch of science was very great; each practitioner keeping his own method of manipulation a profound secret. Now the education is systematic and complete. A professional spirit is beginning to pervade the whole body. Even large numbers of men who have not joined the Society, are found conducting their practice in a professional spirit. None are admitted as members of the Society who advertise, and no member who is found to advertise is allowed to continue a member unless he discontinues the practice. The periodical gathering together of men for the discussion of subjects of interest, has resulted in a most liberal contribution of knowledge to the general store.

One of the earliest efforts of this Society was to induce the College of Surgeons to recognize, as the public had long done, and as probably each individual member of the Council of that College

had also long done, viz., that dental surgery was a well-defined speciality, and that a special examination was needed to test men's fitness to practise it. This was soon followed by an effort to establish a school of Dental Surgery. With anxiety and doubt, the house we have so recently left was taken and adapted, as far as possible, for the purpose of a Dental Hospital, and there, in spite of difficulties arising from the absence of light and of sufficient accommodation, the work has been carried on with a success, which I think the most cynical—if any such are to be found among us—must admit has far exceeded the most sanguine expectations of its founders. In fact, our very success has at last driven us out. This part of the programme of the founders of this Society may, therefore, be said to have been accomplished.

This, Gentlemen, leads me to speak of the event inaugurated this evening—the opening of these splendid premises for the purposes of the Dental Hospital, which, as you know, is the offspring of our Society, and with which we remain so intimately associated. For a long time every one has felt how inadequate our house in Soho Square was for the requirement of our rapidly growing school, but there was very great difficulty in the way of obtaining more suitable premises, and it appeared as if we should have to stay there until the end of our lease. I believe that, but for the

activity, intelligence, and munificence of one gentleman, such would have been the case. That gentleman, from the most disinterested motives, having nothing to gain or lose by the success or failure of the school, spent much time in exploring every neighbourhood likely to furnish a suitable site for the Hospital. At last he selected this, as on the whole the best that could be obtained, and as comprising all the points essential for a special hospital like ours. Without delay, at his own cost, he secured the building. When we were first invited to look at the dilapidated house,—a disgrace even to this most questionable square,—I am free to confess my heart sank within me. I need not describe the gloomy, repulsive aspect of the premises, which for years have looked as if they might well have been the scene of one of Dickens's stories; nor need I dwell on the air of misery and neglect which pervaded the whole neighbourhood. These points are familiar to you all. But, Gentlemen, if the exterior was repelling, what shall I say of the interior? Words fail to describe its dingy, melancholy appearance, and yet through all this, the intelligence of the gentleman to whom I am alluding could see what we now see—a building unique in its fitness for the purpose for which it is applied; and, as if to make his triumph the more complete the arrangements had not been long concluded before all London was startled with the news that



Leicester Square was to be converted from a wilderness into a little paradise.

Mr. Albert Grant, the hon. member for Kidderminster, has succeeded, after many difficulties, and at great expense, in purchasing the property, and in the most generous manner has notified to the Metropolitan Board of Works his intention of presenting it to them in trust for the public as a place of recreation. He has further announced a munificent intention of laying out the square in a costly and tasteful manner, and of adorning it with statues of eminent men formerly associated with the locality. Commissions for these statues have been given to leading sculptors; and when the generous donor's plans are carried out, London will possess an additional attraction, and a long-standing reproach and scandal will have passed away.

We owe Mr. Grant our best thanks, which I venture in your name on this occasion to express, for having so considerately yielded to a request to substitute for the statue of Dr. Johnson that of John Hunter, who actually lived in this square, and commenced here the gathering of that marvellous museum, which has no rival in the world. As dentists, we must be particularly gratified by this change, as we shall ever have, looking on this our School the effigy of him whom we have always regarded as the true father of dental surgery in this country.



But a difficulty yet remained ; and that was, to find the money necessary to convert such a dirty, dismal, dungeon-like place, as this house was, into a building worthy of the Dental Hospital of London. This was not a difficulty likely to stand long in the way of one who had already overcome so many. Mr. Saunders—and it is of him, Gentlemen, you are all aware I have been speaking—nobly gave £500, and his wife £100 ; and in addition to these munificent gifts, he has obtained the greater part of the money which has, so far, come to us from without. I am glad to say that, though many felt as I did when I first saw the building, doubtful of its fitness for the purpose, all, with scarcely an exception, have nobly seconded Mr. Saunders's efforts ; and I am proud, as the Treasurer of the Building Fund, to be able to inform you that the building, with all its fittings, will be handed over to the Hospital authorities free of debt ;—no unworthy institution even in this great city, celebrated as it justly is throughout the world for its noble philanthropic and voluntary institutions. But for Mr. Saunders's disinterested and intelligent munificence, the work of this Hospital would still be carried on in that dark corner house in which it first saw what I can hardly, even by a poetic licence, term “ the light of day,” but the twilight of early dawn.

In furtherance of its educational scheme this

Society has founded a Museum and Library. The Museum is at present small, but it is growing as rapidly as we can expect. The Society may be congratulated on having had, for the last two or three years, the services as Curator of a gentleman eminently fitted by knowledge and zeal for the post, and under whose care it has assumed an order and arrangement which make it a credit to the Society and a value to the whole profession. Mr. Charles Tomes reports that "during the past year the contributions to the Museum have been considerably in excess of previous years—that it contains many unique specimens which cannot be matched in any other European or American collection;" and he proposes, having received the sanction of your Council, to issue with each number of the "Transactions" a drawing of the more valuable specimens, accompanied with a description of the object figured on a separate sheet, so that in time the members will have an illustrated catalogue of the Museum. The report, which is too long to be incorporated in this address, will, I hope, appear in our "Transactions," as it contains many suggestions which I think it well the members generally should know, for doubtless, many would be found ready to act on them.

With respect to the Library, the Society is to be congratulated on having secured the services, as Librarians, of two gentlemen in succession who have taken much pride in their self-imposed task,

—Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Thomas Rogers. Under their successive labours order has been brought out of chaos. The Library is now admirably arranged, and a good Catalogue has been compiled. As a technical library it needs little to make it complete.

I now come to the last object which the founders of this Society had in view,—that “of providing a point of union where subjects of interest might be fairly discussed, and contributions hitherto scattered through the pages of medical journals might be collected to form a library of reference.” We must all admit that in this point, as in the others, the Society has been a success beyond almost what its founders could have been sanguine enough to expect. It has issued a series of volumes of “Transactions” which, on the whole, would do credit to any Society. Many of the Papers which have been read and published have been of great research and value; and when one considers the narrowness of the field in which we work, I think great credit is due to those who have contributed to our “Transactions,” for the freshness and originality of their Papers. The volumes which have been already published by the Society are indeed a valuable library of reference. The meetings are always well attended, and, in addition to the Paper, there is a copious supply of incidental communications of great practical value.

During the short existence of this Society the attention of the whole medical world has been drawn to an anæsthetic which in many respects eclipses its predecessors in its marvellous powers. As Nitrous Oxide was first made practically available as an anæsthetic by a dentist, it was but natural that this Society should be early in the field as an investigator of its merits. It appointed a Committee, which has issued, under the sanction of the Council, two exhaustive Reports on this agent ; thus illustrating the great importance of the existence of such a Society.

It is a remarkable fact, and one which cannot be passed over in silence at such a moment as the present, that the world is indebted to a dentist for the original application of a highly volatile body as an anæsthetic. The enormous popularity of Chloroform, especially in this country, has almost caused people to forget the man to whom, above all others, the merit is really due of producing insensibility to pain under the surgeon's knife. To a dentist in an obscure part of America the credit belongs of introducing the first anæsthetic—sulphuric æther—one to which, after a brilliant career enjoyed by its rival, men are returning under a belief that it is more safe. That the world should be indebted for such a boon to a dentist, who, unhappily, after conferring such a blessing on suffering humanity, died in penury, leaving a widow and a son to struggle with adversity, is

a fact which must not be forgotten. Would that the outside world had supported an effort recently made to send substantial help to her whose husband had so blessed his race !

I have not yet made any allusion to the gratifying financial progress of this Society. By dint of great economy in management, it has accumulated a small capital, which, I venture to hope, it will use from time to time in rewarding men who confer signal benefits on their profession. My mind at this moment recurs to one who has conferred within the last three or four years one of the greatest boons our profession has ever received. I refer to Dr. Barnum, who has given us the coffer-dam. I cannot detain you while I describe the immense benefit which his application of a very simple material has conferred on the public. To those amongst us who are dentists, any such description is unnecessary ; but I will venture to express a hope that some early occasion will be taken to show Dr. Barnum how highly his invention is appreciated on this side the Atlantic.

Apart from the direct advantages which have accrued from the existence of this Society, I think every one will be ready to admit that a very much higher tone of professional conduct has pervaded the whole body of late years. The elevating influence of the Society has spread far beyond its own circle, and, although there are



still to be found too many practising as dentists who are utterly unworthy of any recognition, we cannot but hope that the day is drawing near when 'a similar protection will be extended to the public against dental as against medical impostors ; and that those only will be able to practise our art who have by a recognized course of study qualified themselves to pass such an examination as will then be deemed necessary to assure the public against absolute ignorance. Until, therefore, some such protection has been extended to our craft, this Society will not have fully accomplished its purpose ; but the thorough and efficient manner in which it has performed its actual work will, I trust, satisfy all that it will not fail to move when wisdom suggests that to move is to succeed. I venture on my own responsibility to say this much in answer to the demands often put forth in the pages of various journals. I know the Council is ever alive to the honour and real welfare of the profession, and its members at large may rest assured that it is often in action when, from its silence, it might be supposed to be asleep.

One of the medical reviews in a recent article says, " Perhaps there is no speciality in surgery which has made greater advances within the last ten years than that concerned with diseases of the dental organs." We who know what has taken place among us can endorse every word of



this statement. I often say our work has been revolutionized within the last twenty years. I believe I am not exaggerating when I say that we now save 80 per cent. of teeth which so recently as twenty years ago were sacrificed. We have added enormously to our labour, I fear, without any corresponding increase in our pecuniary reward. The public are too apt to think that one stopping is very like another; and to offer us the same fee for one to which we may have devoted an hour or even two hours, as for one on which we might have spent a few minutes. I feel that some effort should be made by the entire body to change this system, or it will inevitably bring back a less thorough style of work than that which we all are now endeavouring to accomplish. The difficulty of the operation of stopping a tooth is far greater than the outside world imagines. Some time since one of our most distinguished civil engineers was standing by my side while I was filling a tooth, and expressed his astonishment at the difficulty of the operation; he said it was engineering of the most perfect kind on a minute scale, and required in the highest degree the peculiar talent necessary for success in his own profession.

In the mechanical department of our work changes as great as in the surgical department have taken place. Here, too, we accomplish results which a few years since were scarcely

dreamed of, so that artificial teeth are now, indeed, regarded by the physician as necessary adjuncts to his art of healing.

But, Gentlemen, time would fail me to enumerate all the miseries which are inflicted by diseased teeth, and consequently all the benefits which Dental Surgery has conferred on suffering humanity. I live in hope that the time will come when the value and importance of our speciality will receive that gracious recognition which discriminating Royalty has not been slow to accord to every branch of science or art which has proved itself to be a benefit to the nation.

One aspect of Dental Surgery remains to be briefly noticed,—that which relates to jurisprudence. I believe the important evidence which might at times be given by dentists will ere long be more frequently made use of than it is at present. It must be in the recollection of all how, a few years since, guilt was brought home to the murderers of O'Connor through the evidence of his dentist. It happened to me once, by my technical knowledge, to prevent a man being put on his trial for murder. The case was briefly as follows: A woman who had been seen walking one evening in a lane with a man with whom she was keeping company, was missing the next day. Suspicion naturally fell upon her companion, against whom, however, no evidence of a

conclusive character could be brought. Several years afterwards, alterations were being carried out in this lane, when the labourers came upon a skeleton. The news soon spread through the village, and every one hoped that at last the body had been found, and that the mystery would be cleared. On hearing the rumour, a surgeon said, "If that is the body of poor Sarah, you will find the first jaw-tooth of the right side of the lower jaw missing, for I extracted that tooth just a fortnight before she disappeared." On examination, that tooth was absent and no other. On the strength of this fact the supposed murderer was again apprehended; but during the examination, some magistrate, more intelligent than his fellows, suggested that the opinion of a dentist might be valuable. The skull was accordingly brought to London by the superintendent of police, and shown to me, when I at once pronounced it not to be the skull of the young woman, for the tooth had evidently been extracted a year, at least, for the absorption of the socket was complete. Moreover, the molar teeth were much too abraded for a young person. Under these circumstances the case was not proceeded with. The works in the lane, which had been stopped, were resumed, and it was then discovered that the lane ran through what had at one period been a burial-ground.

I met, also, last year with a remarkable case,

in which two families claimed a body found in the Thames as their relative. One of the families, being Roman Catholics, had, engaged a priest to say masses for the soul of their relation, ordered the funeral, and would have buried the body ; but the evening before the funeral, the members of the other family thought of requesting that the mouth of the deceased might be examined. In it were found some artificial teeth, by which the dentist who made them could identify the body as belonging to the non-Catholic family. The points of resemblance between the two missing gentlemen were numerous and remarkable, including baldness, a short leg, slight malformation about one of the wrists, and other marks.

But, Gentlemen, great as has been the progress made in our art of late years, we cannot accept the advice given on a memorable occasion, to "rest and be thankful." The latter we may and ought to be, for work already done ; but rest we cannot. Ceaseless labour must be ours. There are vast fields yet to be explored. It appears to me sometimes as if the progress we have made has been merely in removing error ; and perhaps in substituting one error for another. Who shall say but in a few years, with improved means for investigation, changes far greater than any we have yet made will not be brought about ? An acute French writer says : "All philosophy is founded on these two things—that we have a great deal of

curiosity, and very bad eyes. In astronomy, for example, if our eyes were better we should then see distinctly whether the stars really are, or are not, so many suns, illuminating worlds of their own; and if, on the other hand, we had less curiosity, we should then care very little about this knowledge, which would come pretty nearly to the same thing. But we wish to know more than we see, and there lies the difficulty. Even if we saw well the little that we do see, this would at least be some small knowledge gained. But we observe it different from what it is; and thus it happens that a true philosopher passes his life in not believing what he sees, and in labouring to guess what is altogether beyond his sight. I cannot help figuring to myself that nature is a great public spectacle which resembles that of the opera. From the place at which we sit in the theatre, we do not see the stage quite as it is. The scenes and machinery are arranged so as to produce a pleasing effect at a distance; and the weights and pulleys, on which the different movements depend, are hidden from us. We therefore do not trouble our heads with guessing how this mechanical part of the performance is carried on. It is, perhaps, only some mechanic concealed amid the crowd of the pit, who racks his brains about a flight through the air, which appears to him extraordinary, and who is seriously bent on discovering by what means it has been executed.

This mechanic, gazing and wondering and tormenting himself in the pit of the opera, is in a situation very like that of the philosopher in the theatre of the world. But what augments the difficulty to the philosopher is, that, in the machinery which Nature presents the cords are completely concealed from him—so completely, indeed, that the constant puzzle has been to guess what that secret contrivance is which produces the visible motions in the frame of the universe. Let us imagine all the sages collected at an opera—the Pythagorases, Platos, Aristotles, and all those great names which now-a-days make so much noise in our ears. Let us suppose that they see the flight of Phaëton, as he is represented, carried off by the winds; that they cannot perceive the cords to which he is attached, and that they are quite ignorant of everything behind the scenes. ‘It is a secret virtue,’ says one of them, ‘that carried off Phaëton.’ ‘Phaëton,’ says another, ‘is composed of certain members which cause him to ascend.’ A third says, ‘Phaëton has a certain affection for the top of the stage; he does not feel at his ease when he is not there.’ ‘Phaëton,’ says a fourth, ‘is not formed to fly, but he likes better to fly than to leave the top of the stage empty’—and a hundred other absurdities of the kind, that might have ruined the reputation of antiquity, if the reputation of antiquity for wisdom could have been ruined. At



last come Descartes and some other moderns, who say, 'Phaëton ascends because he is drawn by cords, and because a weight more heavy than he is descending as a counterpoise.' Accordingly, now we no longer believe that a body will stir unless it be drawn or impelled by some other body, or that it will ascend or descend unless by the operation of some spring or counterpoise; and thus to see Nature, such as it really is, is to see the back of the stage at the opera." \*

If our forefathers had possessed better eyes, how much labour would have been spared to their descendants! Generation after generation would have continued the task of building up the great temple of eternal Truth, instead of one generation pulling down and scattering the work which a previous generation had performed, as is now too often the case. Therefore, accept nothing as final. The field in which your intellectual activity has to manifest itself is not limited by rubrics or fettered by Acts of Parliament. Its limits are the limits of Nature. Within these limits work earnestly, but work reverently.

"Search, undismayed, the dark profound,  
Where Nature works in secret; view the beds  
Of mineral treasure, and the eternal vault  
That bounds the hoary ocean; trace the forms  
Of atoms, moving with incessant change,  
Their elemental round; behold the seeds

---

\* Fontenelle, "Pluralité des Mondes," *Conversat.* 1.

Of being, and the energy of life,  
Kindling the mass with ever-active flame :  
Then to the secrets of the working mind  
Attentive turn ; from dim oblivion call  
Her fleet ideal band ; and bid them go  
Break through Time's barrier, and o'ertake the hour  
That saw the heavens created : then declare  
If aught were found in these external scenes  
To move thy wonder now." \* ,

---

\* Akenside, " Pleasures of Imagination."

---